



Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs Newsletter

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Message from the Director

Jonathan B. Hook, Ph. D.



A young girl surveys an open dump on tribal land.

The young Indian girl stood there, arms outstretched, blue windbreaker flapping in the wind. She was looking out over a huge open dump near her ceremonial center. I couldn't quite hear her words, but her gestures said it all: "What's up with this?"

Sacred sites and ceremonial grounds are not all that are affected by pollution. Tribal Traditional Lifeways are often impacted by human environmental stressors, from the fish and animals we eat to the lakes, ponds, rivers and streams in which we swim.

The **EPA Tribal Science Council** (TSC) was created in partnership with tribal representatives to help integrate Agency and tribal interests. The TSC has been saying for several years that Traditional Lifeways and cultural uses should be included in EPA's risk assessment process.

This was a major topic at the Chicago TSC meeting in early April. Common ground was

found between the Indian and the EPA scientists, a potential process was identified, and a commitment was made to move it forward.

The TSC is a group that can bring about real change. It works with the Indian Program Policy Council, comprised of the highest level of EPA decision-makers. Curtis Munoz, Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma, is the national Tribal Science Council co-chair and brings both professional skills and enthusiasm to his position.

I look forward to working with Curtis and the TSC as it addresses the unique challenge of environmental protection in Indian Country.

Oklahoma Students Participate in International Video Conference

The Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs facilitated an international indigenous students' Video Conference on March 14, 2007.

Participants included youth from Ufa-Shigiri (Russia), Sarawak (Malaysia), and the Kiowa Tribe and Kialegee Tribal Town (Oklahoma, U.S.A.). The theme for the conference was "Our Communities, Our Envi-

ronment, Our Future."

The students' goals for this initial conference included exchanging information about communities, introducing current local issues, and most importantly, beginning to forge lasting relationships. The students exchanged contact information in order to continue their dialogue and are looking

forward to planning their next video conference.



Oklahoma students greet their peers from around the world.

Tribal Team Update

Eve Boss, Acting Associate Director



Eve Boss (R) pays a visit to Renee Hood, Absentee-Shawnee Tribe.

The R6 Tribal Team annually manages about \$7 million in General Assistance Program (GAP) funds. GAP grants provide financial assistance for environmental capacity building activities. For the last several years we have been able to maintain a base level of support for interested tribes and consortia of \$110,000.

The regional funds are allocated in the spring after proposals have been re-

viewed and discussed. Applications are due in late spring and awards are made throughout the summer. The amount we award varies annually.

This year we set aside funds to clean up wastes impacting Indian country. This decision will allow the GAP funds to play a significant role in meeting the Agency's commitments. Goal 3 of EPA's strategic plan is the preservation and restoration of land.

Solid and hazardous waste is the one area in which the GAP program can support direct implementation. Region 6 tribes are spending roughly one million dollars in GAP funds to promote recycling and to clean up areas to prevent and address solid waste problems in Indian country. For example, the **Osage Nation** of Oklahoma reports cleaning up six illegal dumps this year with GAP funding.

Environmental Justice Team Update

Shirley Augurson, Associate Director

2007 is proving to be a busy and exciting year for the EPA Environmental Justice (EJ) initiative and the EJ movement in general.

I recently had the privilege of participating in the State of Environmental Justice in America 2007 conference in Washington, DC. I left feeling that the EJ battery had been recharged to take us to the next level of EJ problem-solving, collabora-

tions and accomplishments. The EJ Team continues to stretch limited resources to address the many EJ issues and concerns of EJ communities in our Region. We are currently working on providing training for communities, renewing our internal Regional EJ Fundamentals training efforts and improving integration of EJ into EPA programs.

We also continue our out-

reach efforts to communities to assist them with collaborative problem-solving efforts. Our team has been partnering with our states on EJ integration, and we are collaborating with Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to hold state EJ Listening Sessions. We look forward to enhancing our partnerships to improve the environment.

Agua Para Beber

U.S. Mexico Border Program Update



Health promoters teach safe water practices.

The Agua Para Beber program addresses some of the severe health problems of substandard living conditions in colonias. Along the 2000-mile U.S. Mexico border, the poorest residents in the United States live in underdeveloped residential subdivisions (colonias) that lack basic services, including water and/or wastewater services.

The Agua Para Beber program is run through the University of

Texas at El Paso and supported in part by the EPA U.S. Mexico Border program. The program uses train the trainer methodologies, community-based health promotion techniques, and inexpensive, simple methods to address the lack of water and sanitation services. Using popular education, the program trains community health promoters and gives them skills to become proprie-

tors of their own program. Health promoters are usually volunteers who work with 10 families in their communities. Health promoters explain the relationship between water quality and health, water disinfection techniques, general hygiene and safe water storage practices, and teach participants how to measure safe levels of chlorine in drinking water.

Brownfields Assessments Help Communities

Superfund Program Update

EPA's Brownfields Program supports the cleanup, restoration and revitalization of brownfields in local communities. Brownfields are property where the expansion, redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by contamination.

The EPA Region 6 Brownfields Team provides a Target Brownfields Assessment (TBA) service to communities to support their redevelopment projects. In order to clean up or restore a brownfield, the degree and extent of contamination has to be determined first.

TBA services help communities with this initial stage of the land restoration process.

TBA services typically provide communities with a site investigation report or cleanup planning document. Communities can then move forward with cleanup or restoration activities as needed. Should cleanup be required, tribes are eligible to apply for the nationally competed EPA Brownfields Cleanup grants.

The **Ysleta del Sur Pueblo** was recently selected for a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant

for identifying priority sites, conducting environmental site assessments and supporting community outreach efforts.

EPA accepts proposals requesting cleanup grant funds annually, and the next proposal submittal date will be in late 2007. If you have questions about EPA's TBA program or how the Brownfields Team may assist your community, please contact Dorothy Crawford at 214-665-2771 or at crawford.dorothy@epa.gov.



A formerly contaminated site in Albuquerque is now the home of Melloy Dodge.

Save the Date for the Tribal Children's Environmental Health Conference

Please save the date for the **Tribal Children's Environmental Health Conference** August 22-23 in Denver, Colo. Planning is underway to bring together physicians and other public health professionals to discuss how toxics and pollutants in the environment impact children's health.

The conference hosts are EPA and the Rocky Mountain Region Pediatric Environmental

Health Specialty Unit and is targeted to Tribal Environmental and Health Directors and their staff, Tribal Health Care Providers (IHS clinics), Day Care Providers, school administrators, teachers, school nurses, child/youth organizations and parents.

Potential topics for the conference include methamphetamine use, smoking and health effects, asthma, tribal tradi-

tional healing methods, drinking water, wastewater, mold, lead, healthy pregnancies, obesity, school environments, and fish and shellfish contamination in relation to traditional diets.

Continuing education credits will be available. For more information on the conference, please contact Paula Selzer at 214-665-6663 or at selzer.paula@epa.gov.

**Save the Date
For the
Tribal
Children's
Environmental
Health
Conference
August 22-23
Denver, Co.**

Campaign to Reduce Unspent Funds

Grants Management Program Update

Two years ago, Congress rescinded \$80 million that had been issued to EPA for grants, contracts and interagency agreements. Congress and EPA's Office of the Chief Financial Officer focused on rescinding millions of dollars from expired EPA grants with unusually large balances remaining.

We must not ignore the lessons learned from that experience. Grant closeouts are important to

reduce unliquidated balances. Unliquidated balances occur when grants whose project periods have expired remain open with unspent money.

EPA Region 6 has developed an ambitious campaign to reduce unliquidated balances by encouraging grantees to promptly submit annual Financial Status Reports (FSR). FSRs must be sent to the Las Vegas Finance Center for reconcilia-

tion. Any funds remaining on the grant can be returned to EPA for future use.

Once the FSR is approved and processed, the grant will be officially closed by the Region 6 Grants Management Office. EPA grantees are urged to support this effort. If you have questions about this initiative, please contact Hattie Brown at 214-665-7423 or at brown.hattie@epa.gov.

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Upcoming Activities

Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs

As the vision and roles of our office continue to expand, we are bringing in a Special Projects Coordinator to focus on outreach activities. The new person in this position will facilitate action and provide focus on these activities.

Our office is currently working to implement several new initiatives, including:

- Developing plans for a meeting of non-federally recognized Native communities in the Region
- Developing interagency training for tribal leaders in areas such as grant application and management, business plans and economic development activities
- Providing outreach to Environmental Justice communities along the Gulf Coast and U.S. Mexico Border areas for Emergency Response readiness
- Exploring the possibility of creating a database of potential Special Emphasis Projects for tribes and Environmental Justice communities and
- Organizing a Regional Environmental Justice State Coordinators meeting.

As always, we welcome your ideas and suggestions on how we may better serve you, and we look forward to partnering with you on these new and exciting activities!



**EPA collaborative meeting
with stakeholders in the
San Antonio area**



**Ignacio de la
Vega, a
representative
of the
Jumano
Apache Tribe
of West
Texas**